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SAYS HOXHA'S ALBANIA IS A HOSTAGE IN TITO'S HANDS

Serge Karsky

Since the break between Belgrade and the Cominform and Albania's alignment with Moscow, rumors have circulated periodically that the fall of Enver Hoxha's regime was imminent, as the result of internal revolt with foreign support. Meanwhile, the Albanian regime continues in power, and less is heard of the resistance movements today than has been the case for several months.

Last year, an uprising against Enver Hoxha was in preparation under the aegis of the British secret services, which had set up a base of operations on the island of Corfu. The US was informed, but limited itself to support of the Committee of Albanian Liberation, which was then in process of formation abroad. The US kept the Athens government entirely out of the picture, though the latter had a prime interest in such an operation, and even used its formal veto against every action of General Papagos, who was as eager to destroy the rebel nests in Albania as to restore Northern Epirus to Greece.

The Yugoslav government prudently remained aloof, preferring to await the outcome of the operation. While not wishing to give up its advantage to the British and the Greeks in case the revolt succeeded, Belgrade preferred not to give Moscow any pretext for more violent Cominform action against Yugoslavia.

The chief agents of the British services, abandoned on all sides, were caught and hanged in the public square in Vlone. Their followers scattered to the mountains, where they were hunted and reduced to impotence. Hoxha's government gained a momentary respite and a slight increase in prestige.

The whole operation failed, and was bound to fail, because the Yugoslavs did not support it. They wanted, in effect, to keep Albania as a hostage from Moscow. The many Yugoslav supporters on Albanian soil are in constant contact with the Kosovo Committee, and receive everything from instructions to shipments of arms through it. This committee was formed on Yugoslav territory near the frontier by Albanians under the direction of Frasherli, the former

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Albanian Minister to France. The Yugoslavs actually are the only ones in a position to stir up an insurrection with any real hope of success. The Free Albanian Committee (once in Paris, later transferred to New York, and still later to Rome) cannot play a role like that of the Kosovo Committee in present-day Albania.

The impatience of the British resulted to some extent from reports they received on the fortification of Vlone (Valona) Bay, and especially on the island of Saseno, which appear now to have been considerably exaggerated. These reports, published last September in *Harper's* in the US and later supported before the House of Lords by Sir Samuel Hoare, spoke of very extensive fortification work designed to transform the Vlone area into a powerful air and naval base under Soviet direction. Apparently, however, the project was on a much smaller scale. The supply ships have not been seen to carry concrete, steel, or tools, but only food and clothing for the workers (some of whom are Germans) concentrated in that area. Presumably the Russians in charge of this project are interested in repairing wharves and improving airfields and emplacements for antiaircraft batteries rather than in building new fortifications.

Surrounded as it is at present, Albania is not likely to be able to form a serious base of attack. Neither Belgrade nor Moscow has ever lost sight of this fact. Albania is still not a member of the Cominform and has a treaty of mutual assistance only with Bulgaria. Recently, after the conclusion of the agreement between Yugoslavia and the US on flights over Yugoslav territory by Pan-American Airways planes and the subsequent establishment of an air line connecting Belgrade with the West and the Near East, rumors began to circulate in Belgrade that flights over Yugoslavia by aircraft of the USSR and the Cominform countries might be cut off. This prohibition, if applied, would isolate Albania, which would then be linked with the Soviet bloc only by sea. However, this measure was specifically reported to be held in reserve for well-calculated use only.

The Hoxha regime, more threatened than threatening, will remain in power as long as the Cominform takes no violent action against Yugoslavia. Marshal Tito's government, having no desire to provide Moscow with a pretext for war or to incur the charge of complicity with the "monarcho-fascists" in Athens (who certainly would not miss an opportunity to satisfy their territorial claims to Northern Epirus), is restricting itself at the moment to propaganda warfare and isolated incidents, designed to keep the political temperature of Albania simmering.

However, if the Cominform should decide to take decisive action against Titoist Yugoslavia some day -- rumor mentions this spring -- the fate of Enver Hoxha and his regime would probably be settled within a few weeks. Now they are as good as cash, but at that moment they would become a threat to Yugoslavia. The disappearance of a hostage with no future value would be welcomed by the government in Belgrade.

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